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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000652

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FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/PPD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SCOL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S JUNE 3 CALL ON MINISTER OF
INFORMATION: THE SALAFISTS ALREADY PRESSING

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and b.

11. (C) SUMMARY. In their introductory June 3 meeting, Ambassador notified Minister of Information Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al Sabah that we were ready to sign a memorandum of agreement between the Ministry and the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB). The Minister voiced concern about increasing pressure from the Salafist element in the recently elected Kuwaiti Parliament. He also discussed the ongoing need to combat extremist ideology among youth in Kuwait, as well as the need for the United States and Kuwait to increase cultural exchanges. When queried by the Ambassador about canceled political talk show programming, the Minister attributed it to normal seasonal programming changes, adding that as of June, the Ministry's focus was on Ramadan programming for the coming September. END SUMMARY.

IBB AGREEMENT READY TO GO FORWARD

12. (U) In his June 3 initial meeting with Ambassador Jones, Minister of Information Shaykh Sabah Al-Khalid expressed his desire to sign the Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) with the International Board of Broadcasters (IBB). (NB: Then BBG Director Glassman initiated discussion of the MOU during his November 2007 visit to Kuwait.) The Minister stated that he has sent final changes back to IBB and that he looked forward to signing the agreement in the coming weeks. The Ambassador mentioned that the diplomatic note should be expected in the coming weeks and that we were ready to move forward, including the provision of 50 training slots requested by the GOK. The Minister reiterated that he appreciated the training made available through Article 2 of the current agreement, which was originally signed in 1992 by both sides.

PRESSURE FROM PARLIAMENT

13. (C) Referring to recent articles in local press citing Salafist Parliamentary members' criticism of the Ministry for permitting a Lebanese talent show to recruit in Kuwait, the Ambassador asked how the GOK planned to manage this. The Minister ruefully responded that he had been dealing on a "daily" basis with these Parliamentarians and finally had asked them if they didn't have more important issues on which to focus. That said, the Minister finally offered that it was their duty as a government to engage the Salafists in regular dialogue to influence them. He went on to voice support for the democratic process, citing it as "our way to the future," adding that it was the duty of Kuwait to convince "our GCC brothers" of the benefits of a democratic system.

POLITICAL PROGRAMMING SUSPENSION TEMPORARY

14. (U) In this context, Ambassador raised the GOK decision in February 2008 to suspend airing of political talk shows, such as "Six Over Six," and asked whether this was a permanent "suspension." The Minister sidestepped the question, attributing programming changes to seasonal promotions, and said the Ministry's current focus was the production of new fall -- particularly Ramadan -- programming. (Note: We were informed by another source that the moderator of the popular "Six Over Six" political call in show has arranged with a private network to continue their show. End Note.)

COMBATING EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY AMONG KUWAITI YOUTH

15. (C) Several times, the Minister underlined the importance of "touching the hearts and minds" of young people in Kuwait, to prevent them from embracing an extremist ideology. He emphasizing the importance of moderation, or "wassatiya." He specifically cited the importance of engaging youth in schools and in mosques. He said that several years ago there were problems of Kuwaiti youth going from Kuwait to Syria to Iraq, and from Kuwait to Iran to Afghanistan to fight in the two conflicts.

INCREASED CULTURAL EXCHANGES

16. (U) The Minister emphasized that he hoped to accelerate
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exchanges and programs of a cultural nature between Kuwait and the U.S. The Ambassador noted a recent very successful ACCESS Microscholarship Program, which involved Kuwaiti youth visiting U.S. military personnel stationed at nearby Camp Arifjan. The Minister agreed U.S. military personnel stationed in Kuwait could be an important part of such cultural exchanges.

17. (U) Comment. Kuwait traditionally has enjoyed one of the most free presses in the region, having recently grown to over 17 print dailies. It will be interesting to see what if any changing social trends -- as reflected in the new Parliament -- will affect freedom of the press in the future.

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JONES